The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon has comprehensive policies in place for the protection of children and youth from abuse, as well as guidelines for the screening and selection, training and monitoring of those who work with youth in church programs.

Those policies and guidelines are an essential starting point for best practices as a diocese or parish. But as churches and the diocese move into the world of social media, using email, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and other forms of digital communication to share our message, more guidelines are needed to protect both adults and youth.

There is one key difference between print and digital media: something posted on the Internet lives forever. Once posted, careless or cruel remarks, bullying behavior, or thoughtless personal observations, can't be recalled.

Everyone who uses social media, therefore, is responsible for appropriate behavior and for maintaining healthy boundaries. The guidelines in this document are intended to help as parishes and organizations face the challenges already present in communication—but which are enlarged and complicated by the speed and accessibility of digital media

These are the commonly accepted principles of Healthy Boundaries and Safe Church:

- Adults have more power than children and youth.
- Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
- The mutuality of friendship cannot exist when there is a disparity of power.
- Two unrelated adults must be able to maintain visual contact with each other any time they engage in ministry with children or youth.
- Windows in doors allow a clear view of interactions with children, youth and adults who may be vulnerable.

General information about Digital Communications in a Safe Church:

- All digital communication is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and may be shared with others.
- Interactions in the online world need to be transparent, just as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual—online—world healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to just as they are in the physical world.
- In the physical world, "friend" can mean much in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship, but in the online world, "friend" can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. Be fully aware of the difference.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

Social media accounts maintained by the diocese, parishes or church organizations should be registered to those entities, not as personal accounts. Images posted should be church-appropriate; all content posted should be consistent with how the diocese, parish or organization wants to present itself to parishioners and to the world at large.

Clergy are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.

- Individual personal profiles of clergy are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Clergy should not submit "friend" requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
- Clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with parishioners are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that all

parishioners may join. The purpose of having a personal profile and parish group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with parishioners and real family, friends and colleagues.

- Clergy should consider the impact of declining a "friend" request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in "real world" relationships. Clergy can direct "friend" requests from parishioners to the parish's group page.
- Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
- When a cleric's ministry at a parish or other ministry setting ends, the cleric should remove parishioners as "friends" or contacts in all forms of digital communications

Emails, texting, Twitter and mailing lists are not an appropriate means of communication for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged, or require extensive communication.

Emails should not be considered private correspondence. Do not include anything in an email that you would not want on a billboard on a major highway. Similarly, take a moment to consider the ramifications of your message before clicking on the *Send, Reply All* or *Post* button.

When sending emails to members of a committee or a vestry, it is preferable for members to see one another's email addresses so they can respond to an individual member rather than the group as a whole.

For large group mailings, on the other hand, sharing many email addresses can be space-consuming; in addition, some individuals don't like to see their addresses posted at large. It's best, with group emails, to use the blind carbon copy (BCC) feature.

A few basic rules for social media where children and youth are involved:

- E-mail and texts between adults and youth also must include the youth's parents or guardians.
- Communication between adults and youth via Face book, Twitter, MySpace or other social media must be public. Private messages, instant messages, or chats are prohibited.
- Any comments that are or seem to be bullying, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating are never allowed.
- As well, sexually-oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities are never allowed.
- Posting of inappropriate photos or videos, or inappropriate comments about pictures or videos are prohibited.
- In the case of parish social media, possible violations of these rules should be reported to the rector or senior warden, who are obligated to review the report.
- If youth report inappropriate interactions with an adult, or abuse, a report in writing should be forwarded to the rector or senior warden for review; the rector or senior warden will do appropriate follow-up, and when necessary the adult volunteer will be terminated from any role working with youth. In cases of abuse, the rector or senior warden should refer to diocesan guidelines for more information.
- Parishes should have in place a photo release policy governing how photos of youth can be circulated.

Recommendations for publishing/posting videos or photos online

- Congregations must inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space.

- Any faith community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media MUST post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.
- All communities of faith should take care to secure signed Media Release forms from adults and guardians of minor children who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for minor children or youth.

Sources for these policies and guidelines:

Policy for Media and External Communications, Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, Pendleton
Policy on Social Media & Sexual Abuse, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Hood River
Guidelines for Email, Social Media, & Other Forms of Digital Communication in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth
Internet Use Policy: Social Media An Addendum, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia
Suggested practices & guidelines for use of social networking websites & other forms of digital communications, Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

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